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SUBJECT: ARRESTS MADE AFTER RADIOACTIVE DUMPING - CLEAN-UP AND
SEARCH FOR MISSING ORE CONTINUE

¶1. (U) Didace Pembe, GDRC Minister of the Environment, announced November 9 that police had arrested seven people, including law enforcement officers, in connection with the illegal dumping of roughly four tons of radioactive waste in the Katanga province. Pembe said those arrested included all who were "charged with disposing of these minerals." The seven charged have been in custody for ten days, but the search continues for another thirteen to fifteen tons of waste.

¶2. (U) GDRC authorities in Likasi, Katanga province, seized between seventeen and nineteen tons of mineral ore with levels of radioactivity far exceeding government limits in late October, and ordered it to be sealed in the Shinkolobwe mining site. (Note: Most copper and cobalt ore mined for and produced in the Katanga Province has traces of uranium and is measurably radioactive due to associated radioactive substances, such as radium. End note.) The personnel charged with transporting the radioactive waste dumped roughly four tons over a bridge into the Mura River six miles south of Likasi when they could not access the closed uranium mine. Chinese-owned Magma Company and Indian-owned Chemaf, registered owners of the copper/cobalt ore, never took possession after the ore had left Kolwezi and before it was confiscated in Likasi. Magma and Chemaf have not commented on the dumping.

¶3. (U) The radioactive waste continues to threaten the drinking water for the 300,000 residents of Likasi, where one of the pumping stations uses water from the Mura River. Pembe made public statements on local radio and television stations to inform the local population and to prevent further consumption from the affected water station. A team of experts from the Ministry of the Environment and DRC's Atomic Energy Agency set up a quarantine zone around the dumping site, and says a clean-up is underway.

¶4. (SBU) Comment. Some EU diplomats in the DRC suspect the Chinese company may be somehow involved, but the connection between copper/cobalt ore with abnormally high levels of radioactivity and companies from two nuclear powers is tenuous. The dumping was likely a result of the transportation crew's difficulties in accessing the secure Shinkolobwe site. The GDRC made arrests quickly, and the Minister of the Environment has been active in finding solutions to both the clean-up and the missing ore. End Comment.

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